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Smit, Peter Ben

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# Questioning Divine $\delta\epsilon\iota$

## *On Allowing Texts Not to Say Everything*

Peter-Ben Smit

Vrije Universiteit, Amsterdam, Netherlands

*p.b.a.smit@vu.nl*

### Abstract

Frequently,  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  is associated with salvation history and the exercise of divine will and identified as “theological  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ ” or “divine  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ ”. In the history of scholarship, there is an increasing emphasis on interpreting  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  along these lines, thereby marginalizing other shades of meaning that this verb may have. The question is whether this course of interpretative action is justified. This will be tested in this article. In order to do so, first a brief overview of the possible shades of meaning of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  will be provided; second, the occurrences of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  in the Gospel of Mark are systematically reviewed; third and finally, concluding reflections will be offered, including a word of caution when it comes to deifying  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ . In this manner, the current study seeks to contribute to the undoing of the *theosis* of this particular part of early Christian vocabulary.

### Keywords

divine will – Greek lexicography – Gospel of Mark – salvation history – history of interpretation – theological  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  – hermeneutics – predestination – determinism

### 1 Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Frequently, the brief word  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  is associated with salvation history and the exercise of divine will, sometimes with descriptions such as “theological  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ ”

<sup>1</sup> This paper benefitted greatly from discussion in the New Testament Research Colloquium (Nieuwtestamentisch Werkgezelschap) on 6 April 2018 (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), the Rev. Dr. Nico Riemersma was kind enough to supply a number of additional references to pertinent literature following that presentation.

(Breytenbach)<sup>2</sup> or even “divine δεῖ” (Cosgrove).<sup>3</sup> Whereas there might be cases in which this is justified, it also seems to be the case that there is an increasing emphasis on interpreting δεῖ in these terms, i.e. by stressing its function of indicating a reference to the divine will, preordaining the course of history and making this explicit in the interpretation of the verb, thereby marginalizing other shades of meaning that this verb may have and doing injustice to its literary effect. As soon as one interprets the word in terms of “God wants” or “God requires,” then more is said than the word itself indicates, given that it actually leaves open the answer to the question who is the source of the necessity or fittingness expressed by it. In this respect, it functions analogously to the agentless passive third person singular, frequently misidentified as a *passivum divinum*, but, as Renssen and Smit have shown, usually much more mundane and less divine in nature than one would be led to think by the term “divine passive.”<sup>4</sup>

In order to achieve our present purposes, the following steps will be taken. First, a brief overview of the possible shades of meaning of δεῖ will be provided. Next, the cases in the Gospel of Mark, in which the term occurs, are reviewed systematically, asking what sort of meaning δεῖ may have here and what the literary effect of its usage is. The Gospel of Mark has been chosen as a case study because, as will be indicated below, it seems that most interpretative efforts concerning our verb have been focused on the Gospel of Luke and subsequently the ensuing results have been used as an interpretative lens for the remainder of the New Testament. Finally, concluding reflections, including a word of caution when it comes to deifying δεῖ, will be offered. In this manner, I hope to contribute to the undoing of the *theosis* of yet another part of the New Testament vocabulary.

## 2 Shades of δεῖ—the Lexica

When surveying the standard lexica in the field of early Christian/Hellenistic Greek, the picture that emerges is consistent among the various dictionaries: A lexicon like Louw-Nida, for instance, has the following to say:

- 2 Cf. Cilliers Breytenbach, “Narrating the Death of Jesus in Mark: Utterances of the Main Character, Jesus,” *ZNW* 105 (2014) 153–168, 158, states: “In Mark 8,31 he puts his suffering, probing and rejection, death, and resurrection as the Son of Man under the theological δεῖ.”
- 3 Charles H. Cosgrove, “The Divine Δεῖ in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan Understanding of God’s Providence,” *NovT* 26 (1984) 168–190.
- 4 Cf. Peter-Ben Smit and Toon Renssen, “The *passivum divinum*: The Rise and Future Fall of an Imaginary Linguistic Phenomenon,” *Filología Neotestamentaria* 47 (2015) 3–24.

71.34 δεῖ: to be that which must necessarily take place, often with the implication of inevitability—‘to be necessary, must.’ δέον ἐστὶν ὑμᾶς κατασταλμένους ὑπάρχειν ‘it is necessary for you to calm down’ Ac 19.36; ὅταν δὲ ἀκούσητε πολέμους καὶ ἀκοὰς πολέμων, μὴ θροεῖσθε δεῖ γενέσθαι ‘don’t be troubled when you hear (the noise) of battles (close by) and news of battles (far away); such things must happen’ Mk 13.7. It is impossible to tell in a context such as Mk 13.7 whether δεῖ implies mere inevitability of an event or whether the events are somehow part of the plan and purpose of God. The latter interpretation could only be derived from broader theological implications and not from the meaning of δεῖ itself.<sup>5</sup>

In particular the last statement is of significance, i.e.: the lexica, not only Louw-Nida, but also Bauer—Aland, Bauer—Danker, Liddle Scott Jones, Friberg and Thayer, do indicate that δεῖ *can* indicate a divinely willed or decreed necessity, but by no means that this is always the primary meaning (it is usually listed as the *last* possible meaning in the various works at stake) or even the most obvious. Also the most recent major addition to Greek lexicography, i.e. the *Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* lists only one instance of “destiny” or “providence” (c.q. Herodotus, *Hist.* 2.161.3) in more than two columns of uses of the verb.<sup>6</sup> This is quite different from the way in which δεῖ is being discussed in New Testament studies, it seems, where divine necessity seems to be the first, rather than the last meaning of the expression. This reluctance among lexica gives additional reason to wonder whether New Testament exegetes are not overinterpreting things. Also, when trying to work one’s way through classical studies, it seems that δεῖ is much less frequently seen as an indication of fate than one would assume given the state of New Testament studies.

### 3 Fate and Divine Causation: Apocalypticism and Historiography

Another observation is worthwhile to offer here: the possibility to distinguish in antiquity, at least on a certain level, between fate and the divine will. A classical instance is Herodotus, *Hist.* 1.91.1: τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἀδύνατα ἐστὶ ἀποφυγεῖν καὶ θεῶ (“Even for a god it is impossible to change predestined fate”). In other words, it was apparently possible to leave open to some extent where “fate” came from. This has led to all sorts of interpretative problems, given that

5 Johannes P. Louw and Eugene A. Nida (ed.), *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1989) *ad loc.*

6 Franco Montanari (ed.), *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015) 471-472.

the texts involved are hard to systematize theologically, as Versnel has noted,<sup>7</sup> but it does shed light on a key pre-text of some of the New Testament uses of δει, Dan 2:28-29 (trans. NRSV):

28 ἄλλ' ἔστι θεὸς ἐν οὐρανῷ ἀνακαλύπτων μυστήρια ὃς ἐδήλωσε τῷ βασιλεῖ Ναβουχοδονοσορ ἃ δει γενέσθαι ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν βασιλεὺ εἰς τὸν αἰῶνα ζῆθι τὸ ἐνύπνιον καὶ τὸ ὄραμα τῆς κεφαλῆς σου ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης σου τοῦτό ἐστι  
29 σύ βασιλεὺ κατακλιθεὶς ἐπὶ τῆς κοίτης σου ἐώρακας πάντα ὅσα δει γενέσθαι ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν καὶ ὁ ἀνακαλύπτων μυστήρια ἐδήλωσέ σοι ἃ δει γενέσθαι.

28 but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries, and he has disclosed to King Nebuchadnezzar what will happen at the end of days. Your dream and the visions of your head as you lay in bed were these: 29 To you, O king, as you lay in bed, came thoughts of what would be hereafter, and the revealer of mysteries disclosed to you what is to be.

What I think is interesting here is that Daniel also distinguishes between God and that what needs to take place (πάντα ὅσα δει γενέσθαι, v. 29). Even if one would want to argue that God has also decided what needs to happen, Daniel's language does not identify the two. It is also possible to read this text in such a manner that God reveals something that God has not caused or decreed here.

Also when it comes to Greek historiography beyond Herodotus, for instance in the work of Polybios, it is well possible to use δει in order to indicate "ein nicht in Frage zu stellendes menschliches Verhalten im Rahmen der sozialen Gemeinschaft," as Becker has argued, without directly referring to *divine* causality.<sup>8</sup> Hence, it is somewhat surprising that she shifts so quickly afterwards to a heavily theological interpretation, i.e. along the lines of Gundry and Gnllka as an expression of the "Unbedingtheit des göttlichen Willens," which leads to the observation "Der Tod Jesus is somit theologisch begründet"<sup>9</sup>—the

7 Henk Versnel, *Coping With the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology* (Leiden: Brill, 2011) 186-190.—See also on the reception of Herodotus in Byzantine and Protestant Christianities respectively: Vasiliki Zali, "Fate, Divine Phthonos, and the Wheel of Fortune: The Reception of Herodotean Theology in Early and Middle Byzantine Historiography," and Anthony Ellis, "Herodotus Magister Vitae. Or: Herodotus and God in the Protestant Reformation," both in *God in History: Reading and Rewriting Herodotean Theology from Plutarch to the Renaissance* (ed. Anthony Ellis; Newcastle, 2015 [<http://docplayer.net/54003948-God-in-history-reading-and-rewriting-herodotean-theology-from-plutarch-to-the-renaissance.html>]) 85-126, 173-245.

8 Cf. Eva-Marie Becker, *Das Markus-Evangelium im Rahmen antiker Historiographie* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2006) 174.

9 Becker, *Markus-Evangelium*, 174.

ancient historians point in a much more reticent direction: it was necessary, but this does not need to be a direct divine necessity. This picture is confirmed by Rothschild's survey of the use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  among Greco-Roman authors, notably historiographers, including Luke. She connects the expression predominantly to its use by Greek oracles and understands it to function as a "subcategory of the compositional technique of proof-by-prediction."<sup>10</sup> In stressing this, she modifies the view that  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  refers to the divine will, by noting that "where the divine will is explicit in Luke-Acts,  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  is conspicuous by its absence."<sup>11</sup> Rather, in Luke-Acts "the simple verb  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  is used to bolster the plausibility of the present version of the events through highly curtailed proofs (syllogistic) of necessity."<sup>12</sup> Rothschild does not make explicit herself the inverse conclusion: that  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  occurs, in this light, not so much as a direct and explicit reference to *divine* necessity or the *divine* will, but is likely to have a more generic meaning, as a rhetorical cliché, as it were.

#### 4 Backgrounds in the History of New Testament Research

When asking the question where the strong identification of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  with divine will or divine causation stems from in New Testament studies, two things are worth pointing out.<sup>13</sup> The first has to do with a longer trend in the interpretation of classical texts in a (Christian) theological framework that seeks to do away with the "gap" (in Eco's sense) concerning or the opaqueness of the provenance of providence,<sup>14</sup> which Versnel and Ellis (and others) have researched, the other has, I think, to do with two influential contributions to the discussion in the 20th century, given that they are both much quoted, Walter Grundmann's (also of both "Arian Jesus" and Stasi fame) article on  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  in the *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament*<sup>15</sup> and Charles H. Cosgrove's 1984 paper, "The Divine  $\Delta\epsilon\iota$  in Luke-Acts: Investigations into the Lukan Understanding of God's Providence," published in *Novum Testamentum*,<sup>16</sup> while the line of thought represented by both is found with particular force and clarity in a contribution

10 Clare K. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts and the Rhetoric of History* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2004) 212.

11 Rothschild, *Luke-Acts*, 212.

12 Rothschild, *Luke-Acts*, 212.

13 See also Rothschild, *Luke-Acts*, 189-194, for a survey of earlier research.

14 Cf. Umberto Eco, *Lector in fabula: Die Mitarbeit der Interpretation in erzählenden Texten* (München: Hanser, 1990) 62.

15 Walter Grundmann, " $\delta\epsilon\iota$ ," *ThWNT* 2 (1935) 21-25.

16 Cosgrove, "Divine."

by Erich Fascher. The trend just mentioned can be exemplified well with reference to Grundmann in particular,<sup>17</sup> who also presents a brief systematizing survey of δει in ‘pagan’ literature, stressing the notion of a “neutral” deity of fate behind it, while indicating next that such a deity is not to be found in biblical tradition, where a God who personally calls humans and shapes history by means of the divine will takes center stage. Subsequently he demonstrates how this works by focusing on Luke, arguing or at least implying that whatever happens in Luke is representative for the rest of the New Testament (Grundmann leaves some room for other ways of using δει, but only marginally and this aspect of his article has not received much attention in its subsequent reception). His conclusion is that Luke uses Hellenistic conceptuality and vocabulary, but gives this a Christian content, consisting of a reference to the (eschatological) execution of a divinely willed plan for the world (in Christ and the church). A consequence of this is, it seems, that a tendency to present a picture of New Testament theology in which God is in control of it all and in which Lukan theology is representative for the entire New Testament has come to dominate the scene. Fascher has, in the 1954 Bultmann *Festschrift*, expressed its central line of thought quite eloquently:

Steht ursprünglich hinter δει «der Gedanke an eine neutrale Gottheit, an eine ἀνάγκη-Gottheit, die den Weltlauf bestimmt», und «ist dieser Hintergrund in der abgeblaßten Bedeutung der alltäglichen Notwendigkeit noch erkennbar», so kann δει gar kein Äquivalent im AT und NT haben, weil der gesamte Lebensbereich des einzelnen Menschen wie der Völker vom persönlichen Willen eines Gottes, des Schöpfers Himmels und der Erde und Herrn der Weltgeschichte, abhängt, so daß—auch da, wo man den Willen dieses Gottes nicht versteht—ein Ausweichen in ein neutrales δει nicht möglich ist. Man sagt dann eben, Gottes Gedanken seien zu erhaben, seine Wege zu unerforschlich, als daß ein Mensch sie begreifen könnte. (Jes 40 13f. 17 vgl mit Rm 11 33ff) Der, durch den und auf den hin alles ist, kann kein noch mächtigeres Fatum mehr über und hinter sich haben.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Grundmann, “δει.”

<sup>18</sup> Erich Fascher, “Theologische Beobachtungen zu δει,” in *Neutestamentliche Studien für Rudolf Bultmann* (ed. Walther Eltester; Berlin: De Gruyter, 1954) 228–254, 228; see also idem, “Theologische Beobachtungen zu δει im Alten Testament,” *ZNW* 45 (1954) 244–252. See further, e.g., David Paul Moessner, *Luke the Historian of Israel's Legacy, Theologian of Israel's "Christ"* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016) 35–36; see in general also: John T. Squires, *The Plan of God in Luke-Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1993).



In the course of the 20th century, other considerations have been brought to bear on the interpretation of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$ , such as the emphasis on apocalypticism formulated by Bennett,<sup>19</sup> who argued in 1975 that the expression means so much as “God wills it” (a view that can also be expressed with a reference to Scripture in other cases), which he understands not to express a deterministic view of history of a “generally fatalistic belief or hope,”<sup>20</sup> rather the “theological emphasis of this assertion is to strengthen the faithful in times of frightful suffering,” in other words: they are to inspire endurance and faithfulness by the assertion that all is in God’s hands.<sup>21</sup>

In a much-cited paper of 1984, Cosgrove has further developed the exegesis of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  in Luke-Acts, in particular by moving beyond the Jewish/Hellenistic divide and by focusing on the full range of Luke’s usage of the verb. This led him to deny that the expression is a *terminus technicus* (with a single meaning), and to note four distinguishable usages of the verb in relation to the divine will, which is only one aspect in relation to which  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  is being used by Luke:<sup>22</sup> (a) it refers to “God’s ancient plan ... and so grounds the kerygmatic history in divine sanction”; this also explains the use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  in relation to citations from Scripture, in which the plan is “expressed fundamentally”; (b) the verb is a “summons to obedience”: human actors *must* do what God has planned or intended, this also means that “the divine  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  does not carry ideas of inexorability in this conception but those of contingency”; in other words: much depends on the executors of the divine will; (c) the verb also indicates God’s guarantee of his (salvific) intentions, even to the extent of necessitating God to intervene in history, but also working in a manner that is congruent with the desires and actions of God’s earthly servants; (d) the verb also serves to point to God’s ultimate plan in a doxological sense, i.e., it makes clear that the honor belongs to God. In arguing his case, Cosgrove makes an important distinction between  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  as an indication of divine compulsion and between things that must be done logically in order to fulfill a certain divine intention and are, in that sense, fitting, but leave room for actors such as Jesus and Paul to align themselves with this will (or not)—in that sense Jesus *must* preach in Luke 4:43 and *must* stay at Zacchaeus’ house (19:10).<sup>23</sup> It would seem that Reasoner, moving away from his earlier appreciation of Cancik’s notion of (Luke-)Acts as an institutional

19 W.J. Bennett, “The Son of Man Must ...,” *NovT* 17 (1975) 113-129.

20 Bennett, “Son,” 129.

21 Cf. Bennett, “Son,” 129-130.

22 Cf. Cosgrove, “Divine,” 189-190.

23 Cosgrove, “Divine,” 175.



history, which is indebted to insights developed by Conzelmann in his epoch-making, but now in many ways outdated, *Die Mitte der Zeit*,<sup>24</sup> comes very close to this view when he concludes that “the theme of Acts is not institutional history, but it is that divine necessity plays out in the lives of those who proclaim and encounter the word of Jesus.”<sup>25</sup> In agreement with such stress on the verb as a (veiled) indication of the involvement of the divine will is also Mowery in his study of divine necessity in the Lukan passion.<sup>26</sup> In newer additions to the discussion, and as noted above, Rothschild has argued that the use of the auxiliary verb has its background in Greco-Roman oracles and is intended to authenticate events by indicating that they were necessary (“proof-by-prediction”), a tactic that may (!) imply divine causation or divine willing, but does not mention this explicitly, in fact, as already indicated, Rothschild argues that wherever such divine intervention is mentioned explicitly, δεῖ is *not* used in Luke-Acts.<sup>27</sup>

## 5 Δεῖ in Mark

When leaving Luke and the history of research behind, while recalling the broad ancient use of δεῖ at the same time, it is possible to turn to Mark, to see how δεῖ features there. To begin with, it can be observed first that it occurs in four texts with in total six occurrences. The texts are: Mark 8:31;<sup>28</sup> 9:11;<sup>29</sup> 13:7,

24 Cf. the comments of M. Reasoner, “The Theme of Acts: Institutional History or Divine Necessity,” *JBL* 118 (1999) 635-659, 635n1.—See along the lines of Conzelmann also: Siegfried Schulz, “Gottes Vorsehung bei Lukas,” *ZNW* 54 (1963) 104-116, esp. 107.

25 Reasoner, “Theme,” 659.

26 R.L. Mowery, “The Divine Hand and the Divine Plan in the Lukas Passion,” *SBLSP* 30 (1991) 558-575.

27 Cf. Rothschild, *Luke-Acts*, 212 and the extensive preceding argument.

28 Καὶ ἤρξατο διδάσκειν αὐτοὺς ὅτι δεῖ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου πολλὰ παθεῖν καὶ ἀποδοκιμασθῆναι ὑπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων καὶ τῶν ἀρχιερέων καὶ τῶν γραμματέων καὶ ἀποκτανθῆναι καὶ μετὰ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ἀναστῆναι· (Then he began to teach them that the Son of Man must undergo great suffering, and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests, and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.).

29 Καὶ ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· ὅτι λέγουσιν οἱ γραμματεῖς ὅτι Ἠλίας δεῖ ἔλθεῖν πρῶτον; (Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”).

10, 14;<sup>30</sup> 14:31.<sup>31</sup> This is an interesting set of texts, all of which deserve closer scrutiny concerning the use of δεῖ.

The first text, Mark 8:31, already, poses more of a problem than one might anticipate. The state of research is such that the two dominant views are that either a generic reference to a course of events unfolding according to God's plan is in view or a more specific fulfillment of Scripture, functioning as a script for Jesus' life, as it were. The former view is, for instance represented by the commentary of Yarbrow Collins, when she refers to a "divine plan for the last days."<sup>32</sup> The latter view is represented by Pesch' older commentary: "Mit δεῖ ist das «Muß» der den Willen Gottes bekundenden Schriftnotwendigkeit ausgedrückt (vgl. 9,12; 14,21.49)."<sup>33</sup> When looking for a Scriptural reference text, frequently reference is made to Ps 117:22LXX, in which the verb ἀποδοκιμάζω occurs that also appears in Mark 8:31, while (the Markan) Jesus quotes the entire verse in 12:10. In both cases, therefore the interpretation of δεῖ follows the path outlined by Grundmann (and others) and without much discussion it is taken as a reference to the execution of a more or less specific divine plan. Combinations of these views are also found, such as in Evans' commentary:

30 <sup>7</sup> ὅταν δὲ ἀκούσῃτε πολέμους καὶ ἀκοὰς πολέμων, μὴ θροεῖσθε· δεῖ γενέσθαι, ἀλλ' οὐπω τὸ τέλος ... <sup>10</sup> καὶ εἰς πάντα τὰ ἔθνη πρῶτον δεῖ κηρυχθῆναι τὸ εὐαγγέλιον ... <sup>14</sup> "Ὅταν δὲ ἴδῃτε τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως ἐστηκότα ὅπου οὐ δεῖ, ὁ ἀναγινώσκων νοεῖτω, τότε οἱ ἐν τῇ Ἰουδαίᾳ φευγέτωσαν εἰς τὰ ὄρη ... (7 When you hear of wars and rumors of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is still to come.... 10 And the good news must first be proclaimed to all nations ... 14 But when you see the desolating sacrilege set up where it ought not to be (let the reader understand), then those in Judea must flee to the mountains ...).

31 <sup>31</sup> ὁ δὲ ἐκπερισσὸς ἐλάλει· ἐὰν δέῃ με συναποθανεῖν σοι, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ πάντες ἔλεγον. (But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.)

32 Adela Yarbro Collins, *Mark: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2007) 404.

33 Rudolf Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium. Teil 2: Kommentar zu Kap. 8,27-16,20* (Freiburg: Herder, 4<sup>th</sup> Freiburg 1991 [1977]) 49; similarly: Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus II* (Zürich: Benziger, 1978) 16: "Umstritten ist die Deutung der Notwendigkeit (δεῖ), die Leiden, Sterben und Auferstehen bestimmen. In apokalyptischen Texten bezeichnet δεῖ das notwendige Eintreffen jener Ereignisse, die zum Ablauf des Endzeitgeschehens gehören. So wäre das Schicksal des Menschensohnes ein unverzichtbarer Faktor im heilsgeschichtlichen Enddrama. Die Anspielung auf Ps 118,22 aber legt es näher, die Notwendigkeit mit dem in der Schrift verfügbaren Gotteswillen zusammenzubringen." Cf. also the representative contribution Jens Adam, "Der Anfang vom Ende' oder 'das Ende des Anfangs'?: Perspektiven der markinischen Eschatologie anhand der Leidensankündigungen Jesu," in *Eschatologie/Eschatology. The Sixth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium: Eschatology in the Old Testament, Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (ed. Hans-Joachim Eckstein, Christof Landmesser and Hermann Lichtenberger; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011) 91-124, who offers a similar interpretation. See also Breytenbach, "Narrating," 158.

“Lying behind this sense of necessity (δεῖ) is the twin belief of the divine will (cf. Mark 14:36) and its concomitant, the fulfillment of Scripture (14:49).”<sup>34</sup> Such a combined view can also be found in France’s commentary.<sup>35</sup>

However, even if interpretations in terms of an “unvermeidliche Notwendigkeit (im Sinne des Gotteswillens)” are quite typical,<sup>36</sup> it is still worthwhile to ask whether such an interpretation is necessary. In the light of the examples shown above, it would seem that an explication in terms of “the will of God” goes, in fact, beyond what the text itself indicates. The only thing that is indicated is that certain things will need to happen. At the background of this *may* be a clear idea of a particular course of action or a certain fate that God has determined for the Son of Man, but this need not be. It can also be a vaguer idea of necessity that is in play here—as the Danielic tradition showed, it is even possible to speak of God revealing “what needs to happen” to a king, without indicating that it is God who has preordained these things to happen in precisely this way explicitly. Would then, a certain reluctance not be fitting in relation to this first “passion prediction” as well? Such reluctance would suit the two later passion predictions in 9:31 and 10:33–34, from which a notion of “divine will” is absent, all emphasis is on the prediction as such. Yet, Peter’s reaction in Mark 8:32–33 and Jesus’ vehement response to this might seem to contradict a pladoyer for such reluctance: 32 καὶ παρρησίᾳ τὸν λόγον ἐλάλει. καὶ προσλαβόμενος ὁ Πέτρος αὐτὸν ἤρξατο ἐπιτιμᾶν αὐτῷ. 33 ὁ δὲ ἐπιστραφεὶς καὶ ἰδὼν τοὺς μαθητὰς αὐτοῦ ἐπετίμησεν Πέτρῳ καὶ λέγει· ὕπαγε ὀπίσω μου, σατανᾶ, ὅτι οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. Does not Jesus himself point here to God’s plan? It may be the case, yet, it may also be the case that Peter protests against Jesus’ suffering as such and maybe he has heard something in δεῖ that may also be there, but has nothing to do with what God does or does not want: fittingness, i.e.: “It is fitting that the Son of Man suffers much, etc.” This would, in fact, suit Jesus’ answer much better than a misunderstanding on the level of divine planning—who could possibly argue with that? Even Peter may not be rash enough to do that!—, given that, in fact, also different standards are

34 Craig E. Evans, *Mark 8:27–16:20* (Waco: Word Books, 2001) 16.

35 R.T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002) 334: “The basis for this ‘necessity’ (δεῖ) is not spelled out here, but in 9:12; 14:21, 49 it is traced explicitly to what ‘is written’, and the same thought surely underlies this and Jesus’ other predictions of his passion. It is in the divine purpose revealed in Scripture, rather than in the inevitabilities of Palestinian politics, that Jesus finds the pattern for that what is to happen to him.”—France does not comment on the occurrence of δεῖ in chs. 9 and 13 of Mark.

36 This representative formulation is taken from (scholarly informed publication): Hans-Jürgen Findeis, “24. Sonntag im Jahreskreis (B): Mk 8,27–35,” *Perikopen.de* [http://www.perikopen.de/Lesejahr\\_B/24\\_ij\\_B\\_Mk8\\_27-35\\_Findeis.pdf](http://www.perikopen.de/Lesejahr_B/24_ij_B_Mk8_27-35_Findeis.pdf) (p. 8).

introduced for what is and isn't fitting behavior are introduced in this text: 34 Καὶ προσκαλεσάμενος τὸν ὄχλον σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς αὐτοῦ εἶπεν αὐτοῖς· εἴ τις θέλει ὀπίσω μου ἀκολουθεῖν, ἀπαρνησάσθω ἑαυτὸν καὶ ἀράτω τὸν σταυρὸν αὐτοῦ καὶ ἀκολουθεῖτω μοι. 35 ὃς γὰρ ἐὰν θέλῃ τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ σῶσαι ἀπολέσει αὐτήν· ὃς δ' ἂν ἀπολέσει τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ ἕνεκεν ἐμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου σώσει αὐτήν. 36 τί γὰρ ὠφελεῖ ἄνθρωπον κερδῆσαι τὸν κόσμον ὅλον καὶ ζημιωθῆναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ (Mark 8:34-36). The embrace of a different value than honorable standing and a life of luxury in this world that these words indicate fit the οὐ φρονεῖς τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ ἀλλὰ τὰ τῶν ἀνθρώπων in v. 33 at least as well, if not better than a reference to divine and human planning. Where does this leave one with regard to δεῖ in Mark 8:31? With two options: a translation in terms of what Peter may well have heard "it is fitting," or a translation in terms of "it is necessary," but without explicating on whose behalf this necessity exists, "clarifying" that this must be God, would be going beyond the text, which, as is also indicated by the misunderstanding that arises from the use of the expression in the narrative world itself, leaves this open. Seeing a divine δεῖ here would lead to misconstruing what this text does and does *not* communicate—not communicating, of course, leads to a *Leerstelle* in a text that invites further contemplation concerning God's fore-ordaining of history, as it has become a topic of much concern in Christian theology,<sup>37</sup> but that does not mean that one ought to cover up this "gap" when producing an exegesis of the text. In fact, doing so with too much emphasis, would lead to a distortion of the literary artistry that the text represents.

Finally, the following may be noted: One's interpretation of the δεῖ in Mark 8:31 may also depend on whether or not one understands the verse to be a *vaticinium ex eventu*. Without rehearsing the appertaining discussion here,<sup>38</sup> the main point is this: if one assumes the verse to be a post-Easter creation of the early church, it is becomes more attractive to view δεῖ as an indication of a divine plan that, having been unrolled now, can be seen in retrospect and Jesus can be made to speak accordingly. If one, however, thinks that the verse may stem from a pre-Easter stratum of tradition, also known as Jesus' own mouth, then it may well be that the verse entails a much more modest statement: given the course of events, it has become a matter of necessity that Jesus dies

37 Pace the confessional basis of many churches such as the Protestant Church in the Netherlands, which includes the "Leerregels" of the Synod of Dordrecht, with their emphasis on predestination, of which the 400th anniversary is commemorated this year.

38 Cf., e.g., the rehearsal of arguments by Michael Vicko Zolondek, "The Authenticity of the First Passion Prediction and the Origin of Mark 8.31-33," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010) 237-253, and the paper to which it reacts: Michael R. Licona, "Did Jesus Predict His Death and Vindication/Resurrection?," *Journal for the Study of the Historical Jesus* 8 (2010) 47-66.

in Jerusalem.<sup>39</sup> The latter can also still be seen as being tied to a divine plan, but it is less of a pressing assumption to make. In the former case, it would seem that the option of seeing a clear reference to a divine plan here would become more attractive, even if the interpretative caveats formulated above still remain in place quite firmly.

And the second is like unto it: Mark 9:11 (Καὶ ἐπηρώτων αὐτὸν λέγοντες· ὅτι λέγουσιν οἱ γραμματεῖς ὅτι Ἠλίαν δεῖ ἔλθεῖν πρῶτον; Then they asked him, “Why do the scribes say that Elijah must come first?”) has also given rise to seeing divine necessity here, e.g., by Pesch, who refers, in a manner that seems to be still quite representative, to what needs to take place as “schriftgemäss” and according to the “eschatologischer Fahrplan.”<sup>40</sup> However, when reading somewhat more cautiously, there is no clear reason to see a “divine δεῖ” here either, if this means an explicit appeal to the divine will, preordaining history. The verse does indicate, to be sure, a certain sequentiality, which, if one presses things hard and far enough, may be anchored in divine planning, yet, the use of δεῖ here can just as well be understood in a more modest sense: does it not belong to the order of things (without explicating who put things together in this order) that Elijah comes first. An explicit reference to God is not necessary and would, in fact, overstate the importance of notion of “God’s plan” here—there is a plan, or a chronological sequentiality implied, that is true, but nothing more is said about it than just that and, in the light of other uses of δεῖ, this leaves open other questions and is simply a generic reference to fittingness or necessity with a somewhat mysterious “fate” or “ordering principle” at the background, which may or may not have been at the back of Mark’s mind—he did not see reason to explicate “God’s will” here in any case.

The third Markan text, with the most frequent use of δεῖ is part of the Markan apocalypse in chapter 13 of this gospel. In terms of its exegesis and the use of δεῖ, Pesch’ comments are again (still) representative: “Das «was geschehen muß» (V 7c), hat Jesus als der Offenbarer der nach Gottes Ratschluß eingetretenen Ereignisse vorhergesagt (V2 23).”<sup>41</sup> This may also apply to Gnllka’s concluding comment on this section: “Die Gemeinde soll sich im Schutz Gottes

39 Cf. Ulrich Luz, “Warum zog Jesus nach Jerusalem?,” in *Der historische Jesus: Tendenzen und Perspektiven der gegenwärtigen Forschung* (ed. Jens Schröter; Berlin: De Gruyter: 2002) 409-427.

40 Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 78; he refers to Mal 3:23-24; Sir 48:10. See also, e.g., Eugene M. Boring, *Mark* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2012) 263: Jesus’ fate is an expression of God’s will, therefore it must be according to the Scriptures—the necessity indicated in Mark 9:11 thus becomes the divine will.

41 Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 11, 280. See also Boring, *Mark*, 369, with reference to God’s plan. Yarbrow Collins, *Mark*, 605, referring back to Dan 2:28-29.

geborgen wissen: δεῖ γενέσθαι” (emphasis in original).<sup>42</sup> Extensive commentary here is superfluous, given that the same can be said about this text as about its Danielic pre-text. Exemplary criticism can be offered when following the interpretation of Fritzen step-by-step, as he notes that an expression such as δεῖ γενέσθαι (Dan 2:28/Mark 13:7) stems from the realm of apocalypticism (correct), indicates the *necessitas temporum* (also correct), and therefore contextualizes all that is happening (or said to be in the future of the Markan readership) as part of the divine plan (“göttlicher Plan”; overstatement).<sup>43</sup> Evans is somewhat more reticent in his interpretation, noting the link with Dan 2:28, but leaving open who is precisely behind the events that need to take place, commenting in a similar manner on 9:12.<sup>44</sup>

The fourth and final text in which δεῖ occurs is Mark 14:31: ὁ δὲ ἐκπερισσῶς ἐλάλει· ἂν δέ με συναποθανεῖν σοι, οὐ μὴ σε ἀπαρνήσομαι. ὡσαύτως δὲ καὶ πάντες ἔλεγον. (But he said vehemently, “Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you.” And all of them said the same.) Linguistically, this verse could also be rendered in terms of necessity (“if it is planned that I should die with you, I will not deny you”): there is too little in which it differs from 8:31 and 9:11 in terms of statement to render this an impossibility. Interpreters, however, do not usually choose this particular route, but emphasize Peter’s willingness to die, if need be.<sup>45</sup> This observation alone shows already that one has more freedom in interpreting δεῖ than is typically allowed for, or at least: made use of. Yet, even when following a more traditional rendering of the verse, the notion of necessity is invoked, and this would be a clear case in which such necessity cannot be attributed clearly to a higher power or simply to a consequence of Peter’s choice: he desires to remain a faithful witness to Christ may well necessitate his dying, or, alternatively, such dying is planned for him by an unknown entity, should he decide to remain faithful to Christ.

With the exception of the remarks on the final text, which uses δεῖ in a manner that is not generally being interpreted as referring to “salvation history” of a divinely willed course of events, these observations also open up space

42 Gnllka, *Evangelium*, 188.

43 Wolfgang Fritzen, *Von Gott verlassen?: Das Markusevangelium als Kommunikationsangebot für bedrängte Christen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2008) 151n193 (with reference to i.a. Grundmann).

44 Evans, *Gospel*, 307; he notes that there is a link between the expressions on Mark 13 and Daniel 2, but does not make explicit who has decreed or decided that “these things” need to take place.

45 Cf. representatively: Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 383: “δεῖ impliziert hier nicht ein Geschehen nach göttlichem Willen und Plan wie 8,31; 9,11.”



for different accents in the interpretations of δει in relation to Jesus' fate. In particular, it becomes more inviting to think of the δει-statements in terms of expressions referring to what is fitting (and in that sense necessary) for the Χριστός. This could amount to interpreting a text like Mark 8:31 (and with that also the other two passion predictions in Mark) in terms of the Messiah being the Messiah as it ought to be (e.g., while fulfilling a Scripturally scripted pattern of "Messianic identity"—this would be an option even if this pattern was only recognized *ex post facto* by early Christ devotees). This would have the advantage of doing justice to δει, as it can be a reference to "necessity" in terms of "fittingness," as the lexica indicate, it would not suffer from the disadvantage of supplementing an agent (in terms of: the originator of the necessity) where none is mentioned and it is unclear whether emphasis on such an agent is intended, and it would still provide a good fit with the processes of sense making that early Christianity (and probably Jesus himself) went through in relation to Jesus' life, death and resurrection, attempting to understand these in the light of the traditions (including the Scriptures) of Israel.

## 6 Concluding Reflections

The above considerations necessitate the following by way of concluding reflections.

First, it has become apparent that the term δει, while indicating a necessity, does not always have a clear implied agent, in that sense it is akin to what was known to exegetes of an earlier generation as the *passivum divinum* that in reality is a literary trick, which enables an author to simultaneously both indicate an action and to obscure its agent, thereby stressing the event, rather than its author. As far as the use of δει is concerned, with its background in Greco-Roman notions about fate, this is quite fitting, given that the motif or notion of fate could be used to dissociate responsibility for unpleasant events from a key deity, or, more generally, to indicate necessity without wondering any further in what or whom this necessity was grounded. In other words: all emphasis is on something being necessary, not on whoever or whatever caused it to be necessary.—Retaining the *Leerstelle* of the agency implied by δει also means permitting mysterious and unclear aspects of the described (or predicted) course of events to persist and, with that, to allow the question theodicy, to remain an open one. It would seem that ancient texts and their authors were much better equipped to permit such mystery, which does justice to human bafflement vis-à-vis of historical experience and human beings' limited insight



into the ways of the transcendent, be it good or evil, than their modern readers. This is, to be sure, in no sense a typically theological concern, it only has to do with reading properly and allowing texts also *not* to say something (explicitly).

Second and as a consequence of the former observation, if the agent “behind” the necessity indicated by δεῖ is not indicated by a text, it should not be stressed in interpretation either. Greek literature in general, including historiography, as well as (apocalyptic) Jewish texts such as Daniel, abound with rather generic references to things that must happen, without stressing that God has wanted things to happen in a particular way, or that they were fitting to happen in this and not another way. This opacity ought to be retained as a literary and theological feature of texts. This certainly applies to the Gospel of Mark, which ought to be read as a literary work in which words can have their own meaning and function, quite apart from Luke’s use of the same—it seems that in current scholarship the Lukan use of δεῖ has exercised a strong influence on the interpretation of the same auxiliary verb in Mark. Because of this and given what was said in the first conclusion, it would seem wise to retire notions such as “theological δεῖ” and just let the auxiliary verb be as generic as it is.

Third, reconsidering the interpretation of δεῖ as has just been done, also opens up space for alternative interpretations, such as one that emphasizes the aspect of fittingness as the kind of necessity that δεῖ indicates, this would lead to an understanding of texts such as Mark 8:31 along the lines of a “fitting” (and hence necessary) messianic identity, in conformity with the traditions (c.q. Scriptures) of Israel. If such an interpretative focus can stand up to scrutiny, this would shift the attention in the “passion predictions” away from the “prediction” aspect of these statements and to what they say about the (fitting and hence necessary) “identity” of the Messiah, as someone who is handed over, killed and raised.